



Mary Elliot School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104272
LEA Walsall
Inspection number 277121
Inspection dates 31 January 2006 to 31 January 2006
Reporting inspector Patricia Potheary AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	Brewer Street
School category	Community special		Walsall
Age range of pupils	14 to 19		West Midlands WS2 8BA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01922 720706
Number on roll	61	Fax number	01922 612298
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs E Cooper
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Liz Jordan

Age group 14 to 19	Inspection dates 31 January 2006 - 31 January 2006	Inspection number 277121
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Mary Elliot is a community special school. Most pupils have severe learning difficulties and roughly a third have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Well over 10% of these students also have autism with severely challenging behaviours. Two thirds of the students are from White British backgrounds and the majority of those from other ethnic groups are Asian, most of whom do not have English as a first language. Currently, half the students are in the sixth form and half are in Key Stage 4. The school is due to take in students from the age of 11 when it relocates to a new building in two years' time.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mary Elliot is an effective school. It provides a good standard of education for the students and is a remarkably happy and lively place to be. This view is shared by the school. It provides good value for money. Students make good progress and leave the sixth form with suitable qualifications and skills to stand them in good stead in the future. The quality of teaching has improved steadily; it varies from satisfactory to excellent and is good overall. The school is exceptionally successful in helping students develop personal and social skills, grow in confidence and learn how to be more independent. The curriculum is very rich and sharply focused on the different needs of students and the way they learn through practical experiences. The quality of care is very high and students are guided successfully towards the next stage of their lives. Links with school partners, especially parents, are excellent in supporting students' learning and well-being. Leadership and management are also good and are effectively focused on improving the school. However, when students first arrive at the school, information about their learning and achievement is not available for teachers to build on. This slows progress initially. The school has improved well since the last inspection and has the right systems in place to continue improving.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school provides a continuum of education from age 14-19 and, as such, the sixth form is not separate but part of the whole. All students remain for the full four years. The sixth form is equally as effective as Key Stage 4, and again, this view is shared by the school. All teachers teach across the four-year age range equally well. The curriculum is planned to span the full four years. Sixth form students also make good progress, although progress in some areas, such as speaking and listening, tends to speed up largely because their attainment levels are well established by then. As there are no differences in quality perceived between Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, the rest of this report does not distinguish between them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the way information on achievement is gathered when students enter the school, so that work can be targeted precisely to their needs right away.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching so that all lessons are effective in securing good learning and progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievements and the progress they make are good. Suitably challenging subject targets are set individually and reviewed regularly so that each student achieves as well as they can. The fact that the students really enjoy their lessons is one reason

why they do so well. All students leave with an appropriate range of qualifications that enable them to move on to further education, work or specialist placements.

The school has difficulty in receiving accurate information on how well pupils have achieved in their last school. This means that progress on entry to the school is slowed until students' true levels of attainment are known. However, progress in the core skills of literacy, numeracy, science and personal and social development is then clearly good. Students also learn many key skills very well to help them succeed in everyday life as well as their work. Good progress is evident in other subjects, particularly the arts, physical education, science and design and technology.

The school's own analysis shows some variations in progress between different groups and where this appears significant, they have taken action. Students with English as an additional language, for example, are receiving additional help as a result. However, no single group underperforms overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students is outstanding. The school's own assessments indicate that this is the strongest area of its work, where students achieve very well and make rapid progress. Parents are glowing in their praise for the way the school helps their children to become confident, more independent, and prepared for the future.

Students behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They readily help each other out. Students really enjoy all their lessons and take part enthusiastically in the interesting activities provided. During an animation workshop, students conducted themselves throughout the morning very maturely and responsibly. Attendance is excellent.

Students show good awareness of how to keep safe in lessons and there is no bullying. Students have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy. During lunch, they choose plenty of vegetables and they also take part in the extensive range of sports and physical activities on offer. Indeed, some students keep up these activities after they leave school. Students contribute well to the school and wider community through their different responsibilities, including fund raising and preparing for the new school council.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is also outstanding. For example, they study and clearly appreciate different festivals such as the Chinese new year. They also develop their creative talents in dance, art and music very well and take part in several performances. The quiet respect they show for spiritual moments in lessons and assemblies indicates how sensitive they have become to issues beyond themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good. Students make good progress in the majority of their lessons and teaching meets all their different needs. The school's own analysis shows that, although several lessons are outstanding and quite inspiring to students, a significant minority are satisfactory, leading to satisfactory rather than good progress for pupils. There is high quality teaching for students with autism and PMLD. Specialist teaching and good subject knowledge means that the courses taught are successful.

Pupils' learning is carefully assessed so that lessons build well on what students have learned before. The system for homework is excellent and fully involves parents.

In most lessons, teaching is lively and activities excite the students' interest very well. In one lesson, this led to students with PMLD trying very hard to blow through a straw to make bubbles, with considerable success. The excellent team work of teachers and teaching assistants contributes substantially to the good learning taking place. It is a pleasure to see all students relating to mature lesson content with enthusiasm.

In a few lessons, planning is not detailed enough to fully engage those with visual impairment or to give long enough for some students to master a skill. There is insufficient use of signing and other aids in all lessons to secure maximum communication.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is a continuum from age 14-19 with a focus on practical application. For example, literacy and numeracy are planned into every subject rather than being taught discretely. This extended time spent learning core skills in real contexts is successful in securing progress. The practical focus means that students are very interested in everything they learn and build up the essential skills for living. A second vocational focus means that students develop a range of workplace skills for meeting employers' needs. A third, high quality strand of personal and social development, including staying safe and healthy, completes the provision. This means that students are well equipped for their placements on leaving school.

The range of courses is wide but the level of qualifications is more limited. The school is planning to introduce entry level certificates for the highest attaining students to help them do even better.

Enrichment of the curriculum is very good. The school specialises in art and artistic activity, which includes many different visits and visitors. It achieved the 'Artsmark' gold award in 2004 and was recently short listed for an ICT in practice award. In addition, complementary therapies, including regular reiki healing sessions, are provided, leading to increased well-being for students. There are plenty of opportunities provided for extra physical activity, including sailing and residential experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Students have many complex personal needs and are very well cared for on a day-to-day basis, overseen by a leader of health and social care. Systems for safeguarding students are very well applied.

The way students are helped to develop very good personal skills, increase their confidence, learn how to be independent and make decisions is excellent.

Where possible, students are involved in setting their own targets and play a full part in discussing their course portfolios and progress. All students have key skills targets set at two levels, satisfactory and challenging. Careful tracking of their progress towards these means that they are guided to achieve as well as they can. The school is seeking to involve students with the most profound difficulties in this process, and already uses their parents as advocates for them. The lack of information when students first enter the school means that the impact of this careful guidance is initially slow, but really picks up as staff get to know the students. Staff, together with parents and Connexions, make an excellent effort to help students make the right choices for their future placements and courses.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. Self-evaluation is accurate and parents and the local authority are involved well. The school's processes for monitoring and evaluating how well it is doing, including the newly developed system for monitoring the progress made by pupils, are now of a very high quality and appropriately involves the new governing body. This has led to some good recent improvement and means that the capacity to continue improving is good. Leaders at all levels are involved in the self-evaluation process and school improvement. As a result, senior leaders are clear in communicating what needs to be done to maintain and improve the good standard of education and high standard of care.

The commitment to including all students, regardless of their difficulties or disabilities, is very good. All students take a full part in the school's programmes and visits. There are good opportunities for students to be included in college courses. As yet, no students attend mainstream school lessons, although many projects take place with a number of local schools.

Staffing is good with several subject specialists and an effective and experienced senior management team. The accommodation is not entirely suitable, but it is being imaginatively used until the new building is ready. The school provides good value for money.

Links with other agencies, local colleges, and especially the work undertaken to involve parents in the work of the school are excellent and support the well-being of students very well.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	NA
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so helpful to us when we visited your school; we enjoyed the time we spent with you very much. We can see why you are so happy at Mary Elliot. We also enjoyed meeting your teachers and seeing you do so many things.

What we liked most about your school

- How much you learn and the way you make progress.
- How interesting and lively your lessons are.
- The responsible way you behave and how you help each other.
- The exciting things you do and the visits that you make.
- The kind way the staff look after you and keep you safe.
- The way your teachers run the school and make sure it keeps improving.

What we think could be even better

- The information collected about your learning from your last school.
- The way some lessons could help you to learn even more.

We wish you all the very best in the future.